

Firefighters to be assisted by social media

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FIRE and emergency authorities may soon use sites such as Instagram and Facebook to warn about bushfires, an information systems expert says.

Katina Michael, associate professor at the school of information systems and technology at the University of Wollongong, says people are increasingly using micro-blogging sites, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, to record bushfires.

"These unofficial channels are extremely useful during a crisis situation," she told an Australian Science Media Centre briefing on Tuesday.

"In the future we might even have emergency service organisations tapping into this social media capability ... and using this user-generated content to respond to disasters more effectively."

Professor Michael said location-based SMS alerts are already used to keep people updated in disaster areas.

"That's a real innovation to the Australian capabilities, which I think is among the first in the world to actually venture into that kind of mandated approach. This also allows people who are visiting a location, who may be working in a location ... or who may be enjoying recreation activities in a location to be warned about a hazard."

AAP

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